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# People, Places and Things

By Pauline Cobb Griffin

Who in the South has not heard of the "kunjeres" of the negroes of long ago, their superstitions and their implicit belief in the work- Education, good wages, automo- oiles, good roads and other ele- nents have changed the fiber of and people whose background not so ong since was the mysterious ark African jungle.

Modern negroes are familiar with modern medicine, as was evi- denced by the long line of them- formed in front of the county phy- sician's office several weeks ago when typhoid vaccine was being dis- pensed. They have their own phy- sicians and are aware of the need of the surgeon's knife in op- erative cases. There are, howev- a sprinkling of the old-time ne- groes and some of the supersti- ous younger ones who have not de- parted from the old beliefs. It is common knowledge that there is a "kunjere doctor" in Spartanburg who comes to Morganton at fre- quent intervals to banish the ail- day.

ments and attend to the love and domestic problems of the negroes who believe in his mysterious pow- er.

Many of the old negro women were said to carry "kunjere bags," with which they worked dire spells upon their enemies. These bags sometimes contained a weird col- lection of things, among them be- ing a dried toad, a dried snake skin, an ordinary nail, fingernails, toenails, a feather, little scraps of paper and cloth and several other things. This bag was usually car- ried on the person of the owner and few were allowed to see it. If the bag was left for a time under the house of a person to be "kunjered," it was just simply "just too bad" for the person. There were cures for these curses, howev- er, and there was an unfallible way of telling who had worked the spell. One had only to bury a pa- per of needles under the doorstep

and the first person who came to borrow an article was the one who had worked the spell. In the South there are many persons who can recall old women who could talk out fire. No one knew how it was done but the old women were supposed to pass the secret on at their death to some member of their family and it be- came a precious heritage. Any darkie could tell you that night sweats could be cured with the simple expedient of placing a pan of cold water under the bed, and chills could be cured if the person effected tied a knot in a cotton string for every chill suffer- ed, the string then being tied a- round a persimmon tree by the pa- tient who, after performing the rite, walked away and did not look back. Asafoetida, worn around the neck was supposed to ward off diseases and a dime worn around the wrist to cure rheumatism. There were several other remedies for rheumatism, which was preva- lent among the negroes. One was to carry a buckeye or Irish potato in the pocket; another was to catch fishing worms, boil them down to a paste and rub the part affected; and still another cure was to swal- low one pokeberry three times a day. A remedy for warts was to steal a greasy dish rag, pick the wart and get a drop of blood, take the rag into the woods and bury it and the wart would disappear. If one desired the warts to "go on" some- else, the rag was simply bur- ied under the house of the person whose warts were "wished on." Mad dog bites could be cured by wrapping a moonstone or what was called a "mad stone" into the bandage. To cure a goiter, one had to catch a live toad, rub the goiter with it, then release the toad. "Love powders" were common with negroes and with a number of white illiterates as well, the origin of these going back beyond Shakespeare's time when love philt- ers were supposed to be very po- tent. These were put in food and way of telling who had worked there or she who ate of them would surely fall in love with the one who placed them there. My hus-

and who practiced medicine for a number of years among all classes of people frequently had requests for "love powders," which he hadrag is dropped someone is coming to gravely refuse and admit that hungry. If the right hand itches, you will shake hands with a stran- ger, if the left hand either money or a letter is on the way.

There are dozens and dozens of these quaint superstitions that have come down from year to year which still have many faithful ad- herents. They give one an idea of the workings of the brain of the illiterate type of persons during the early days and they portray the character of the old Southern negro better than any artist's brush.

Most of our superstitions also originated with the old-time South- ern negroes. Every one of them knew that the left hind foot of a graveyard rabbit caught at mid- night on Saturday night, carried in the pocket, would surely bring luck. No negro would willingly touch a hoot owl for, although they knew nothing of reincarnation they felt that a hoot owl was an old person who had died and re- turned to earth in that form. When a hoot owl is heard at night, al- ways you have to do is to stop and turn your shoes over. If a rabbit runs across the road in front of you, be sure and turn your hat around and say "Good morning (or evening) Mr. Rabbit" three times. If it is a black cat, nothing can break the spell of just plain bad luck.

Who has not heard that one must never start a journey or a piece of work on Friday and that a woman visitor should not be al- lowed to enter the house on Mon- day or Friday mornings before anyone else? If she does come bad luck will follow unless she is accompanied by a man, in which case the spell is broken. Salt sprinkled on the door-step of an enemy brings bad luck, but this curse can be removed by sweeping the steps and sprinkling sugar on them.

To carry a hoe through the house is a sign of death to a member of the family and should a spade be carried through the house disaster is imminent. To wash clothes between Christmas and New Year's day is to wash a member of the family away. The howling of a dog presages death, as does the flight of a bird, espe- cially a bat, into the house.

# Superstitious Are Robbed

## "Charm" Merchants Get Rich At Expense Of Negroes

By T. H. Alexander

ONE has not really had any stirring excitement unless he has been in the midst of a murder committed by a negro upon the person of another negro. The scene, of course, must be laid in the South where the participants are farm negroes, having all the superstition and ignorance of farm negroes.

We had a murder, or perhaps I should say just a killing, at Bankrupt Manor not long ago. There



T. H. Alexander is no need to enter into the causes of it except to say that there was a feminine motive. It took place in my tenant house and the lethal weapon—how I used to overwork that word in my police reporter days—was a shotgun which unhappily belonged to me. It had been loaned for hunting purposes so long ago that I had forgotten its existence. That mysterious force known as "the law" now has it for court purposes and the net result of the affray is that I am short a farm hand and a shotgun.

It is the after effect of the killing which aroused my interest. No negro member of the community will go within a mile of that ill-fated tenant house, because it is widely known that the ghost of a murdered man is the most unhappy ghost of all the ghosts. Now there have been laughing ghosts but no ghost who became a ghost by murder ever laughed. He is looking for vengeance.

The negro members of the community have made various efforts to lay the ghost. The most ambitious was to place a new horseshoe over the door of the tenant house. You must have a new horseshoe or the scheme will fail. Then at midnight on a day three days distant from the murder the ghost of what they call "the deceased" in court trials, will come. His horseshoe must be stoutly nailed with the points pointing upward. When the ghost of the murdered man comes he will see the bright new horseshoe and be attracted to it. No ghost was ever known to pass a new horseshoe. He gets tangled up on the points and stays there while his soul slowly oozes out of his

ghostly habiliments, leaving in the morning a jelly-like substance which one must quickly throw in the fire. When this burns, it will be the last of that old ghost and he will be laid forever.

This technique came straight from Africa with the early slaves and has remained on these shores since. It is African witchcraft, widely believed among the laboring classes of Southern negroes. I was seriously asked by one of the harassed members of the family where this killing took place to procure a new horseshoe for this purpose. Did I do it? I leave you only to imagine, what with being in the midst of corn pulling time, wheat planting time and tobacco curing time.

And, at that, this mumbo-jumbo is no worse than the superstition of the early Christians of a large part of Europe that witches flew by night, or that some souls were earth-bound and became vampire bats who sucked the blood of the living and were only released and went on their way, untortured, by having a stake driven through their hearts in their coffins. One of the most successful of the horror books and plays, "Dracula," was founded on this theme.

I have more than once protested in this space against the commercialization of the superstitions of the Southern negro of the farm and laboring classes. There are men in Chicago and New York who are growing rich by selling tokens, charms and voodoo articles to the Southern negroes. Their catalogs are so shrewdly written with the aid of competent legal ability that they are apparently operating within the postal laws but it is a great pity that the law cannot stop these racketeers.

It is a crime that the superstitious negro is induced to send such sums as \$1 and \$2 to a voodoo mail order house for a half ounce of "Holy Oil," which is nothing more than refuse oil drained from an automobile. The Dream Books and Numbers books which foster the numbers racket are bad enough, but "Magic Parchment" at \$3.75 per square foot—it being a high grade of tough bond paper which costs less than a cent a sheet—is even worse. Yet each year from the cotton and tobacco and corn fields of the South there go millions of dollars earned by black folks by the hard sweat of their brows to fatten the pockets of conscienceless racketeers in the cities of America.

For \$1. the ignorant can buy a

charm which is "reputed by our customers in the South" — note the careful phrasing of this quotation from one of the voodoo catalogs—to cast an evil eye on any enemy. For \$2 the customer can buy a "genuine voodoo doll" which is also "reputed" by Southerners of the black race, particularly those in the vicinity of New Orleans where voodoo first originated in this country, to have magic charms. This voodoo doll becomes effective when you stick a pin in its breast; this pin really penetrates the heart of the enemy and he shortly thereafter dies.

But the colored race is a happy race, not much given to feuding or hating, so most of the charms are to bring happiness, success in love and at dice and other forms of gambling. There is one charm which straightens the African kinks by magic. Another makes the black gal yearn for her lover.

We think we know the negro in the South but I doubt if many white men ever understood the heart of so simple a creature as a farm negro. Harris Dickson, the noted Mississippi writer, once took a simple Mississippi negro to a circus. He paid his way for his own amusement to see how the country negro would be impressed. Mr. Dickson was sure the elephants would impress the negro more than anything else, or perhaps the monkeys.

"Yes, suh," said the Mississippi negro, "dey wuz sho' wonderful, dem elephants and dem monkeys wuz sho' funny. Hee, hee, hee. But dem camuels, dey wuz the most wonderful thing in de circus."

"What was so wonderful about the camels?" asked the puzzled Mississippian.

"Why, suh," said the negro, "dem camuels wuz the most wonderful things I ever seed. Mr. Dickson, dey sho' has got a noble smell—dem camuels had the most noble smell I ever smelled in my life!"